

Remarks at a Ceremony Presenting the 5000th Daily Point of Light Award
July 15, 2013

President Obama. Well, good afternoon, everybody. And on behalf of Michelle and myself, welcome to the White House.

Twenty-three years ago, President George H.W. Bush began a tradition. He knew that across the country every day, Americans were finding ways to serve each other and give back to their communities, often with very few resources and very little recognition. And President Bush knew that their good works were valuable to the people they helped. But beyond that, he knew that their spirit of service was vital to our national character. So he created an award, the Daily Point of Light Award, to recognize Americans who serve their neighbors and communities in innovative ways that inspire us all.

And for the rest of his Presidency, nearly every single day, President Bush gave someone a Daily Point of Light Award. And after he left the White House, he kept going and going and going. In between skydiving and other activities—[*laughter*]*—he kept going, which should come as no surprise, since we're talking about somebody who has served his country in such extraordinary ways. And when you do a parachute jump at the age of 85, not just a parachute jump, but another parachute jump—I believe his seventh—this is somebody who's not going to slow down any time soon.*

So today we are extraordinarily honored to be joined by the family that helped build the Points of Light Foundation into the world's largest organization dedicated to volunteer service. President Bush, Mrs. Bush, Neil Bush, we want to welcome you. And we also want to recognize Michelle Nunn, the CEO of Points of Light. It's worth applause.

Now, this is not the first time President Bush and I have come together for an event like this. Four years ago, I went down to Texas A&M, where President Bush has his library, to help celebrate the 20th anniversary of Points of Light. And I appreciated the warm welcome—by which I mean the extremely loud "howdy"—that I received. [*Laughter*] I was deeply impressed by how invested the students there are in community service. But most of all, I was moved by how much they love President Bush.

And now we've come together to mark another milestone. As of this minute, 4,999 Points of Light Awards have been presented to individuals and organizations across this country. And so now I have the honor of joining President Bush in presenting number 5,000. [*Applause*] Number 5,000.

About 10 years ago, Floyd Hammer and Kathy Hamilton were getting ready to retire. They had been farming for years. They had earned a break. They planned to sail around the world. And then their friend told them about a special place that they should visit along the way: In a village in Tanzania, a volunteer mission was helping to renovate an HIV/AIDS clinic. And Floyd and Kathy thought it sounded like a worthwhile detour.

When they arrived in Tanzania, the country was in the third year of a brutal drought. People were starving and dying. Many of them were children. And having seen this, Kathy and Floyd simply had to do something about it. And so their vision of a leisurely retirement was replaced by a new mission: fighting global hunger.

Today, the nonprofit they created, Outreach, has distributed free meals to hungry children here in the United States and in more than 15 countries worldwide: to date, more than 233 million meals. They've gone to see many of the kids that they met in Tanzania grow up healthy and strong. And this work, they say, is the most rewarding thing they've ever done. And I have to say, having just been to Tanzania with Michelle, we can attest to how important this kind of work is, how it changes lives.

It's also fitting that later this week, on July 18, people around the world will celebrate the legacy of the magnificent public servant, Nelson Mandela, by performing acts of public and community service. And as people look for examples, Outreach provides an extraordinary demonstration of how service can lift people's lives.

And so if the purpose of this award is to celebrate Americans who work to make our country and a world a better place—not for their own advantage or for any ulterior motives, but just to serve, pure and simple—I can't think of anyone more deserving than Kathy Hamilton and Floyd Hammer.

Now, before we actually present this award, I would be remiss if I didn't take a moment to honor the man who made this all possible. He hates this, but I'm going to do it anyway.
[Laughter]

Much has been said about President Bush's own extraordinary life of service, but I'm not sure everybody fully appreciates how much he's done to strengthen our country's tradition of service. In addition to this award, he created the first White House office dedicated to promoting voluntarism, and he championed and signed the National and Community Service Act. By Washington standards, it was a modest law. It involved little money; President Bush signed it with little fanfare. But looking back, we see that it sparked a national movement. By laying the groundwork for the Corporation for National and Community Service and AmeriCorps and Senior Corps, it gave tens of millions of Americans meaningful opportunities to serve.

And today, thanks to those programs and others like them, and thanks to the passion of leaders like President Bush and citizens who found the same passion over the years, voluntarism has gone from something some people do some of the time to something lots of people do as a regular part of their lives.

Since 1989, the number of Americans who volunteer has grown by more than 25 million. Service is up across age groups and across regions. It's now a graduation requirement in many high schools and colleges. It's embedded in the culture of businesses large and small. And speaking for my family, volunteering has brought joy and meaning to Michelle and me and our daughters over the years, and I know that's the case for many of your families too.

This national tradition may seem perfectly ordinary to many Americans, especially those who have grown up during this period. But in fact, it reflects tremendous progress. And today, we can say that our country is a better and a stronger force for good in the world because, more and more, we are a people that serve. And for that, we have to thank President Bush and his better half, Barbara, who is just as committed as her husband to service and has dedicated her life to it as well.

Now, the Presidents who followed President Bush have had the good sense to continue this work, and not just because one of them calls him Dad. [Laughter] Even after leaving office, President Clinton and both President Bushes have come together to help people affected by natural disasters here at home and around the world, a reminder that service is not

a Democratic or a Republican value, but it's a core part of being an American. And at the White House today, we're proud to carry forward that legacy.

I created the Office of Social Innovation and Civic Participation to find new ways to use innovation to strengthen service. We expanded the Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships—originally created by President George W. Bush—which works closely with religious and community organizations across the country to help Americans in need.

And today I want to announce a new task force, with representatives from Cabinet agencies and other departments across the Government, to take a fresh look at how we can better support national service, in particular, on some of our most important national priorities: improving schools, recovering from disasters, and mentoring our kids. And this task force will be led by my team here at the White House, along with Wendy Spencer, who is here—the CEO of the Corporation for National and Community Service—who previously led the volunteer commission in Florida for Governor Jeb Bush. So we've got a whole family thing working. *[Laughter]*

In times of tight budgets and some very tough problems, we know that the greatest resource we have is the limitless energy and ingenuity of our citizens. And when we harness that energy and create more opportunities for Americans to serve, we pay tribute to the extraordinary example set by President Bush.

And just to close on a personal note, Mr. President, I am one of millions of people who have been inspired by your passion and your commitment. You have helped so many Americans discover that they too have something to contribute, that they too have the power to make a difference.

You've described for us those thousand points of light, all the people and organizations spread out all across the country who are like stars brightening the lives of those around them. But given the humility that's defined your life, I suspect it's harder for you to see something that's clear to everybody else around you, and that's how bright a light you shine, how your vision and example have illuminated the path for so many others, how your love of service has kindled a similar love in the hearts of millions here at home and around the world. And frankly, just the fact that you're such a gentleman and such a good and kind person, I think, helps to reinforce that spirit of service.

So, on behalf of all of us, let me just say that we are surely a kinder and gentler nation because of you, and we can't thank you enough. So—*[applause]*.

So it is now my great pleasure to join President Bush and all of you in presenting this extraordinary award to an extraordinary couple who have done so much for so many people. We are very grateful to them. Floyd and Kathy, will you please step up and receive your award?

[At this point, the President presented the award, and Outreach Inc. Secretary Treasurer Kathy Hamilton made brief remarks.]

President Obama. Now I think we're going to have Neil come up and——

Points of Light Chairman Neil Bush. We're going to Dad first.

President Obama. ——going Dad first? Do we have the mike? Here we go.

Former President George H.W. Bush. My remarks are simply to say something nice about Neil, my son. *[Laughter]*

President Obama. [Inaudible]

Former President Bush. No, it's not hard to do, and he's been very active in this whole concept of volunteering, helping others. And so it's my privilege then to introduce Neil, and first, of course, thank President and Mrs. Obama for this wonderful hospitality. It's like coming home for Barbara and me. With the rest of you just coming to this magnificent house and being greeted by this superb hospitality knows no bounds.

So thank you all very much. Now, Neil.

[Neil Bush and Points of Light Chief Executive Officer Michelle Nunn each made brief remarks.]

President Obama. Well, thank you very much, Michelle, for your outstanding work. To all the Points of Light Award recipients, we're proud of you, congratulations, and keep up the great work. You inspire us and make us want to do that much more. Especially when you see young people who are already making such a difference and such an impact, it gives you enormous confidence that America, for all its challenges, will always meet them because we've got this incredible character.

And with that, what I want to do is once again thank President and Mrs. Bush for their outstanding leadership. We are so grateful to both of you. I want to thank Neil for his leadership, and I want to make sure that everybody enjoys a reception. And I suspect the food may be pretty good. So—*[laughter]*.

So thank you very much, all of you, for being here. All right? Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:55 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Floyd Hammer, president, Outreach Inc.; and former President Nelson R. Mandela of South Africa.

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